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IMMIGRATION

How Immigrants Forestall Death of More Than 1 in 3 U.S. Counties

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by Jody Brannon



Queens salon owner Milagros Rodriguez, originally from the Dominican Republic, is among entrepreneurial immigrants who have kept New York's population from declining. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

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America hasn't seen such dismal census numbers on population shifts since the days of newsreels, dust bowls, and the mother of all depressions.

One in three U.S. counties is dying, based on a decline in population.

When it comes to the era of the Great Recession, however, were it not for immigrants streaming into major American cities in embattled Detroit, St. Louis, and Pittsburgh, many more counties would be shrinking, as shown in Census Bureau figures released Thursday. Specifically, deaths exceeded births in 1,135 of 3,143 U.S. counties in 2012, up from 880 in 2009.

That figure might have been even higher, had certain people not seen opportunity in areas of decay. For instance, *The New York Times* reports that more people moved to the Bronx, perhaps the most blighted of boroughs with a population of 1.4 million, than left, according to city data.

That's explained by migratory tendencies and opportunities as well as by a decline in birth rate more dramatic among immigrants than whites.

"In a big metro area like New York, there's a lot of niches for people—there's always the upstairs/downstairs phenomenon,"

explained William Frey, chief demographer for the Brookings Institution, about types of jobs among socioeconomic classes of people. "But we're on our way to more-normal migration patterns. Normal in America is to move where the jobs are."

And jobs are not in economically distressed or underdeveloped areas.

Demographer Randy Capps is a senior policy analyst with the Migration Policy Institute's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy. He agreed with Frey's assessment but also

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natural decline of exodus from counties — are risk factors, many of them newcomers.

Without immigrants, many metropolitan regions would have declined; beyond the obvious destinations, namely New York and Chicago (respectively the largest and third-largest), immigrants shored up Detroit, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis.

"Immigrants are innovators, entrepreneurs," said Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder at a recent immigration conference, according to an [Associated Press report](#). "They're making things happen."

A July 2012 report by the [Fiscal Policy Institute](#) indicated that immigrants own 18 percent of small businesses in the U.S., up from 12 percent in 20 years.

Fastest-Growing Counties : Source: Census March 2013

Rank	Geographic Area	Population Estimates		Change, 2010-12	
		April 2010	July 2012	Change	Percent
1	Williams County, N.D.	22398	26697	4299	19.19%
2	St. Bernard Parish, La.	35897	41635	5738	15.98%
3	Chattahoochee County, Ga.	11267	13037	1770	15.71%
4	Fredericksburg city, Va.	24286	27307	3021	12.44%
5	Long County, Ga.	14448	16048	1600	11.07%
6	Richland County, Mont.	9746	10810	1064	10.92%
7	Manassas Park city, Va.	14273	15798	1525	10.68%
8	Stark County, N.D.	24199	26771	2572	10.63%
9	Geary County, Kan.	34362	38013	3651	10.63%
10	Franklin County, Wash.	78163	85845	7682	9.83%
11	Charlton County, Ga.	12171	13295	1124	9.24%
12	Russell County, Ala.	52949	57820	4871	9.20%
13	Andrews County, Texas	14786	16117	1331	9.00%
14	Dallas County, Iowa	66135	71967	5832	8.82%
15	Sumter County, Fla.	93420	101620	8200	8.78%

Source: Census March 2013

Among other figures of interest from the [census](#) and AP reports:

- **The fastest-growing regions** are tied to the oil and gas boom in the Great Plains.

- **5 major U.S. cities** eclipsed certain million milestones in growth, between 2011 and 2012: Los Angeles, surpassing 13 million; Philadelphia, exceeding 6 million; Las Vegas, growing past 2 million; and Grand Rapids, Mich., which broke 1 million.
- **9 metro regions** have populations exceeding 5 million residents.
- **52 U.S. cities** now have at least 1 million residents.
- **New York** remains the largest U.S. city, with a population on July 1 of 19.8 million.
- Overall, the **U.S. population** grew just 0.75 percent, the lowest growth since 1937, AP reports. On July 1, the national population was 314 million, making the U.S. the world's third-most-populous nation, far behind China (1.35 billion) and India (1.21 billion).
- **11 of the nation's 50 fastest-growing counties** are in Texas.
- **Two Florida counties** (Bradford and Hendry) are in fastest decline, followed by a pair in Alabama (Macon and Perry).